



OUR
HOPE

FOR YEARS
TO COME

THE ST. OLAF
CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL 2024

STUDENT PROGRAM NOTES PROJECT

The student-led Program Notes Project aims to educate students and audience members about the origins and significance of pieces performed at the St. Olaf Christmas Festival and to continue building bridges of communication between scholars, performers, and audience members. All notes are researched and written by current and former St. Olaf students under the supervision of Dr. Louis Epstein.

Please note that the official concert program is available in a separate document.

Contributors

Carson Bridigum

Grace Kamarad

Abby Carter

Sila Liljedahl

Jaclyn Duellman

*Peter Markham**

Isabelle Duran

Henry Rye

Shayla Gleason

Abby Schroeder

*Emily Hagel**

Tessa Snicker

Francesca Hajj

Ava Spohn

*Ryan Hemingway**

*Sofie Urberg-Carlson**

Joanna Highfill

Eleanor Wigdahl

Lily Houston

**Student Co-Coordinator*

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Lullaby for Chelsea Rose (Children's Suite No. 2)

Thomas Sleeper

Lullaby for Chelsea Rose was born from a homemade paper box lined with sheet music, containing a small book with a poem inside.¹ “Go to sleep my Chelsea Rose, and tomorrow we’ll have more fun,”² is printed on the book’s pages, blossoming into the comforting and communicative piece from composer Thomas Sleeper. The work was originally composed in 2004 for Sleeper’s niece, Chelsea Rose, as a piece for soprano and piano.³ It has since been arranged for orchestra, the piece having been described as “deeply communicative,” “lushly romantic,”⁴ and “richly lyrical.” by scholars and conductors worldwide.⁵

“He was mystical, but he wasn’t distant,”⁶ says St. Olaf Orchestra director Dr. Chung Park when describing Thomas Sleeper. Sleeper led the Frost Symphony Orchestra at the University of Miami for 25 years and served as Director of the Florida Youth Orchestra for 27 years.⁷ A proud member of the Blind Savannah Clan of the Cherokee Nation, Sleeper’s music—including four orchestral pieces, five symphonies, thirteen operas, and fifteen concerti—was deeply influenced by his Native American heritage.⁸ This rich musical tapestry has resonated with audiences worldwide, and *Lullaby for Chelsea Rose* has been performed across the United States, Europe, and Asia,⁹ including a performance by the prestigious Russian National Orchestra in 2016.¹⁰ After battling Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Thomas Sleeper sadly passed away in 2022, and his musical legacy has been described as “indelible.”¹¹

Thomas Sleeper’s influence and the St. Olaf Orchestra’s performances of *Lullaby for Chelsea Rose* are deeply connected. Conductor Dr. Chung Park, who studied under Sleeper at the Frost School of Music at The University of Miami, recalls how Sleeper believed children were autonomous beings, and how “he talked to them with respect.”¹² With this in mind, Dr. Park invites the audience to listen to this piece “the way a child does.”¹³ He encourages the audience to feel long-lost childhood wonder, awe, and, most of all, hope. The piece begins and ends with a mournful and lonely oboe solo, and is then reassured by the melody in the strings and brass. This simple, yet powerful melody demonstrates the incredible strength and receptiveness of a child’s spirit.

In starting the program with a lullaby, the St. Olaf Orchestra hopes to offer comfort and revelation with Thomas Sleeper’s *Lullaby for Chelsea Rose*, a deeply reassuring piece with a hopeful and heartfelt melody. This piece inspires children and young people around the world—our hope for years to come.

¹ Chung Park, *Video of Paper Box for the Lullaby for Chelsea Rose*, 2024.

² Chung Park, *Image of the Lullaby for Chelsea Rose Book*, 2024.

³ Caroline Ramos, “Lullaby for Chelsea Rose,” program notes for University of Central Florida, *UCF Celebrates the Arts 2020*, Chung Park, conductor, Friday, April 17, Walt Disney Theater, Orlando, FL.

⁴ Dr. Chung Park, interview by Grace Kamarad, October 23, 2024.

⁵ “Thomas M. Sleeper,” n.d. <https://www.sleepermusic.com/>.

⁶ Dr. Chung Park, interview by Grace Kamarad, October 23, 2024.

⁷ UM News, “Frost School of Music Mourns the Passing of Beloved Friend and Colleague, Thomas Sleeper,” October 27, 2024.

<https://news.miami.edu/frost/stories/2022/10/thom-sleeper-dies-at-66.html>.

⁸ Caroline Ramos, “Lullaby for Chelsea Rose,” program notes for University of Central Florida, *UCF Celebrates the Arts 2020*, Chung Park, conductor, Friday, April 17, Walt Disney Theater, Orlando, FL.

⁹ Caroline Ramos, “Lullaby for Chelsea Rose,” program notes for University of Central Florida, *UCF Celebrates the Arts 2020*, Chung Park, conductor, Friday, April 17, Walt Disney Theater, Orlando, FL.

¹⁰ Russian National Orchestra, “Children’s Suite No. 2: Lullaby for Chelsea Rose,” recorded July 1 2016, track 6 on *Thomas Sleeper Symphony 3*.

¹¹ UM News, “Frost School of Music Mourns the Passing of Beloved Friend and Colleague, Thomas Sleeper,” October 27, 2024.

<https://news.miami.edu/frost/stories/2022/10/thom-sleeper-dies-at-66.html>.

¹² Dr. Chung Park, interview by Grace Kamarad, October 23, 2024.

¹³ Dr. Chung Park, interview by Grace Kamarad, October 23, 2024.

Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain

Carolyn Jennings

This sweet and simple piece is a versatile and time-honored favorite, and this is its sixth time being performed at the St. Olaf Christmas Festival. The composer, Carolyn Jennings, is a Professor Emerita of Music at St. Olaf, whose compositions and arrangements have been featured in many of the school's concerts. Some of her best-known pieces include "The Loons," "The Raucouc Ark," and "A New Magnificat," which was performed at the Christmas Festivals of 1980 and 1996. Her late husband, Kenneth Jennings, conducted the St. Olaf Choir for over 20 years. "Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain" was composed for the choirs of the McFarlin Memorial United Methodist Church in Norman, Oklahoma, and their director of music, Michael B. Richardson. This is not the only Jennings piece of the concert: She is the arranger of the returning Christmas Festival piece "Ding Dong Merrily on High."

"Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain" is composed of an SATB choir with a keyboard and an optional children's choir (here represented by Manitou Singers). It is loosely based on verses 9-12 of Isaiah 40. While not directly about the coming of Christ, these verses focus on the presence and gentleness of God, and the joy that comes with this knowledge. The main melody of the song is a constant ascending and descending D major scale reminiscent of the rise and fall of waves. This metaphor can be applied to the full piece, starting soft and slowly building to a climactic 5 part harmony before softening once again. A prevailing theme of this piece is childlikeness, both in how we approach God and in the vision of the Christ child. This message is further highlighted by verses 1, 2, and 4, which are sung by the children's (or in this case treble) choir. The text of this song could manifest itself in a bold declaration or fanfare, but Jennings instead creates a calm, peaceful message of the loving embrace of God, and wonder at the gift of Christ.¹⁴



¹⁴ "Artist - Carolyn Jennings." *GLA Publications - Sacred Choral Music, Hymnals, Recordings and Educations Materials, Roman Catholic, Christian*, giamusic.com/artists/carolyn-jennings.

"Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain." *Christology in Music*, 17 May 2017, christologyinmusic.wordpress.com/climb-to-the-top/.

Hark A Thrilling Voice is Sounding

(ELW 246)

William Henry Monk, arr. Timothy Marr '78

The hymn “Hark a Thrilling Voice is Sounding” invites all listeners to join in celebration of the hope and light that Christ brings to earth through its spirited and timeless melody. It is a translation of a Latin hymn, “Vox Clara Ecce Intonat” and is typically sung at the beginning of Advent. The Latin hymn dates from the fifth or sixth century to the time of the Gregorian chant.¹⁵ Together, the orchestra accompanies all voices throughout five verses to tell a declarative and hopeful story of Christ in the season of his birth.

The Latin text has been translated into English twenty-seven different times throughout history, but among the most well-known is Edward Caswall’s 1847 translation “Hark! A Thrilling voice is sounding”.¹⁶ Throughout the 19th century, Caswall translated more than three hundred Latin hymns into English and his translations are widely circulated within modern hymnaries.¹⁸ In 1850, English composer, hymn writer, and organist William Henry Monk composed a hymn tune titled “Merton” for The Parish Choir.¹⁹ Monk was born in 1823 and spent many of his years as a choirmaster at King’s College London.²⁰ Sixteen years later, Monk first set “Merton” to the text of Edward Caswall’s translation of “Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding” and published it in the 1861 edition of the hymnal *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.²¹ It is this timeless and spirited setting that circulates modern hymnaries, and also what was arranged by Dr. Timothy Mahr ‘78 for the St. Olaf Christmas Festival, where it was last performed in 1999.

Dr. Mahr retired in 2023 after spending nearly thirty years as the director of the St. Olaf Band noted the importance of this piece’s message as one of bringing people together into a unified “sense of hope” for the future. Accompanied by the St. Olaf Orchestra, the hymn quickly bursts into life as all four voices begin the first verse in unison. The melody follows a familiar rise-and-fall pattern, lifting us into the height of the dissonance and urgency of each verse’s message, before setting us back down to float into each resolution. The fourth verse reminds us that Christ’s love will shield us even as the world is filled with fear. And as the hymn comes to a close, we are reminded that “Christ, the sun, all earth dispelling, shines upon eternal skies” - welcoming us to join in the celebration of a new season filled with love in the face of fear, finding light within darkness, and hope for years to come.

¹⁵ “En Clara Vox Redarguit | Encyclopedia.Com.”

¹⁶ Hymnary.org. “Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding.”

¹⁷ “Hymnology.” <http://hymnology.hymnsam.co.uk/h/hark!-a-thrilling-voice-is-sounding>.

¹⁸ “Edward Caswall | Hymnary.Org.” https://hymnary.org/person/Caswall_Edward.

¹⁹ Oxford, Clerk Of. “A Clerk of Oxford: Vox Clara Ecce Intonat: Newman’s ‘Hark! A Gladsome Voice Is Thrilling.’” *A Clerk of Oxford* (blog)

²⁰ “Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900/Monk, William Henry - Wikisource, the Free Online Library.” Accessed November 5, 2024. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Monk,_William_Henry.

²¹ “Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900/Monk, William Henry

Lift Up Your Heads

(*Messiah*, HWV 56)

George Frideric Handel

A staple of the Christmas tradition, George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* has inspired and uplifted audiences for centuries since it first premiered. The idea of the oratorio was first proposed by Handel's long-time friend, Charles Jennens, an heir to the rich estates in the Midlands of England in 1741.²² Jennens understood the dramatic potential of oratorio, and how the sacred and liturgical texts resonated in the hearts of the audiences even outside of the context of the church.²³ He carefully selected the text from Scripture, to justify the idea that Jesus Christ was truly the Messiah. He conveyed this by subtly telling the story of Jesus's mission through the Old Testament texts that were held to predict it.²⁴ The text of "Lift Up Your Heads" in particular is Psalm 24:7-10. The original intention of the oratorio was to be performed in London during Passion Week, but Handel found the work to be more valuable during his visit to Dublin in 1742, where he premiered it as part of a charity event.²⁵ *Messiah* was officially premiered in London in March 1743, under the title *A New Sacred Oratorio*, which served to avoid the controversy of using sacred text in a non-sacred setting.²⁶ The piece was performed twice more in 1745 before being performed under its original title in 1749.²⁷ *Messiah* is originally associated with Easter and was a staple of the Easter season by the 1900s. The work is now associated with Christmas due to a marketing ploy. The large crowds gathered at Easter inspired marketers to perform the work at Christmas. For a few decades, it was standard for both holidays, but by 1960, it was largely transformed into a Christmas event, as we know it today.²⁸

"Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates" illustrates the grand, celebratory feel that is associated with *Messiah*. This chorus is located in Part II, Scene 3, titled "Christ's Ascension." The second part in particular focuses on the Passion of Christ, which includes Jesus's entry to Jerusalem, the Last Supper, his arrest, his trials, his crucifixion, and his ultimate death and resurrection. The original score is for two trumpets, timpani, two oboes, two violins, viola, and basso continuo alongside the five-part choir.²⁹ The chorus initially divides between two groups, with the altos serving as both the bottom line of the soprano choir and the top line of the tenor and bass choir. The beginning of the movement is contemplative, with the two choirs calling for the gates of heaven to open, while questioning each other about who is this King that is to come. Then, the two choirs unite to answer the questions with excited exclamations of "He is the King of Glory!" The word "glory" is emphasized throughout by elongating the word with several different notes in succession. The piece projects and predicts the coming of the Lord into humanity through Jesus Christ, as well as the idea of moving forward and entering into something greater than the self.

²² <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040060?rskey=XMqfJI&result=3>

²³ <https://www.yourclassical.org/story/2023/12/11/handel-messiah>

²⁴ <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630>

²⁵ <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040060?rskey=XMqfJI&result=3>

²⁶ <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6055&context=somp>

²⁷ <https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6055&context=somp>

²⁸ <https://www.yourclassical.org/story/2023/12/11/handel-messiah>

²⁹ <https://www.themorgan.org/music/manuscript/115317/288>

Sing Nowell, Sing Gloria!

(Kodāya's Carol)

Olaf C. Christiansen '25

Performed in recognition of St. Olaf College's sesquicentennial, "Sing Nowell, Sing Gloria!" was composed by Olaf C. Christiansen, a prominent American conductor and alumnus of St. Olaf College.³⁰ Following the tenure of his father, F. Melius Christiansen, founding conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, he served as the second conductor of the ensemble from 1941 to 1968.³¹ In their time as conductors, both wrote extensively for the college's ensembles, with this piece debuting in the 1962 Christmas Fest under the direction of Olaf Christiansen himself.

Christiansen set this modern carol to a poem by Dr. Osbert W. Warmingham (pseudonym Kodaya). Born to British Indian army officers in Andhra Pradesh, India, Warmingham moved to the United States at the age of 21 and became a poet and professor of theology at Boston University. Warmingham published his poetry in his 1936 book *Carols and Chorales*, which included an earlier version of this poem entitled "Sing in Excelsis Gloria."³²

Olaf Christiansen's compositions and arrangements strongly emphasize the sacred text he sets rather than the music itself.³³ Christiansen sought to make his music so that the audience felt sensitized to the message of the Holy Spirit.³⁴ "Sing Nowell, Sing Gloria!" exemplifies this belief. Set in a jaunty 6/8, the piece starts in a fast, chorale style, exalting joy in the coming of Christ. Throughout the piece, Christiansen calls for freedom in the tempo, giving much care in depicting certain keywords and characters in the nativity story. The treble voices sing in a duet of shepherds and angels in the latter half of the first verse, and then the tempo slows, setting a quiet spirit of the world in waiting. The piece then jumps back to a jovial mood, with tenors and basses proclaiming "Sing in Excelsis Gloria" ("Sing in Glory to the Highest") in canon with the treble voices. With heavy rubato, the musical shaping in verse two exudes the intimate, ever-flowing, motherly love that Mary has for her son. In addition, the word peace throughout the work possesses a slowing, sighing motif, breathing in a sense of rest and calm patience in cadence.

"Sing Nowell, Sing Gloria!" bridges the St. Olaf Choir to the generations of Ole choristers who came before them. Historically, this piece was performed in the 1999 Christmas Fest under the direction of Anton Armstrong in his ninth year as director of St. Olaf Choir, and in the 1977 Christmas Fest under the direction of Kenneth Jennings. Under three directors and decades of performances, "Sing Nowell, Sing Gloria!" is a time-tested, cherished staple to the ensemble that reinstills the group's enduring tradition of choral excellence.

³⁰ Christiansen, Olaf. 1953. *Sing Nowell, Sing Gloria!* SATB. JW Pepper.

³¹ Olaf C. Christiansen | ACDA of Minnesota." 2017. Archive.org. 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170204111511/http://www.acda-mn.org/olaf-c-christiansen>.

³² "Osbert Wrightman Warmingham." 2017. Hymntime.com. 2017.

³³ Armendarez, Christina. 2006. Review of *The Influence of Fredrik Melius Christiansen on Six Minnesota Conductor-Composers*. University of North Texas.

³⁴ Armstrong, Anton . 1992. Review of *The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music. In Word and World*.

Eit barn er født i Betlehem (*A Child Is Born in Bethlehem*)

arr. Ørjan Matre

“Eit Barn er født i Betlehem” (“A Child is Born in Bethlehem”) draws inspiration from the beloved 14th-century Latin hymn, “Puer Natus in Bethlehem.” Ørjan Matre adapts the hymn into Norwegian, grounding it in medieval Christian liturgical tradition.³⁵ His arrangement revitalizes the classic hymn through modern harmonies and textures, offering a fresh perspective while honoring its historical roots.

The piece begins with the sopranos introducing the central theme, “A child is born in Bethlehem,” supported by rich harmonic accompaniment from the other voices. As the piece progresses through the next two verses, Matre masterfully intertwines the vocal parts, creating a vivid palate of melodies and rhythms. In the B sections, singers are called to improvise lyrics on intricate melodic lines, adding depth and expansiveness to the piece.

The final verse brings the choir together in a powerful unison, declaring, “Come, then, on this day of birth. Rejoice before the Lord and pray!” This climactic moment emphasizes unity and shared joy, capturing the spirit of camaraderie and celebration at the heart of Christmas.



³⁵*A Child Is Born in Bethlehem (SATB) Arr. or | J.W. Pepper Sheet Music, www.jwpepper.com/A-Child-is-Born-in-Bethlehem/10873387.item.*

The First Nowell (Traditional English)

arr. Dan Forrest

The First Nowell is a traditional English carol with text dating back to the fifteenth century. The song originated in the Cornwall region of South-West England. Though a more common form of the title is spelled “Noël” instead of “Nowell,” the latter is the original spelling reflecting the carol’s English roots. Though a specific composer for the melody is unknown, the first recorded publishing of the carol was in William Sandys’s *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* (1833). Both the text and music of the song have evolved over hundreds of years, leading to the version that has become a staple of Christmas performances around the world. The piece has proven to be the most popular of the English carols. The text of *The First Nowell* tells the story of the annunciation of the shepherds, described in the Gospel of Luke:

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (*King*, Luke 2.8-2.14).

Though the lyrics have evolved and become modernized with English, the basis of the carol is this passage from the King James Bible. Dan Forrest is a well-established composer and arranger of choral works. He holds a DMA in composition from the University of Kansas and currently serves as an adjunct Professor at Furnham University. He has made a vivid arrangement of the traditional carol, revising its structure and chords to make it more complex. Listen to the multiple melody lines complementing each other as the song broadens, broadening as the strings and piano grow with the choir until the song climaxes and changes keys, chords echoing through the performance hall as the chorus harmonizes together to create a powerful rendition of this timeless song for a timeless story.³⁶



³⁶“Biography – danforrest.com.” *Dan Forrest*, <https://danforrest.com/bio/>.
Keyte, Hugh, et al., editors. *New Oxford Book of Carols*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
Studwell, William Emmett. *The Christmas Carol Reader*. Haworth Press, 1995.

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

(ELW 289)

arr. Robert V. Scholz '61

From the first second, the cascading melodic *Gloria* of this iconic hymn never fails to inspire the Christmas spirit. The instantly recognizable tune of “Angels We Have Heard on High” has been a classic in the Christmas canon for hundreds of years. The hymn started as a traditional Chant de Noël (Christmas Carol) in France, where it went and still goes by the title “Les anges dans nos champagnes”, meaning “The angels in our countryside”.³⁷ The inspiration for the famous ‘Gloria is not completely certain, but the most popular explanation is the goal of representing the sound of the chorus of angels themselves as described in Luke 2:13-14:

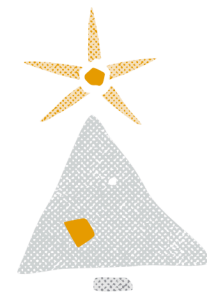
13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

And on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”³⁸

The earliest known printed version we have of the French folk original is from an 1842 French hymnal. Since the creators of both the words and the tune are unknown, however, it is suspected that the words could be older, and the tune older yet.³⁹ Both the melody and the words have since gone through several changes to evolve into the hymn we sing today—most notably its translation to English by James Chadwick (1813-1882),⁴⁰ and the arrangement of the folk melody into the hymnic one we know today by Edward Shippen Barnes (1887-1958),⁴¹ an American organist and composer who studied in France.⁴²

Arranged specifically for St. Olaf’s Christmas Fest massed choir, former professor Robert Scholz (‘61) brings “Angels We Have Heard on High” into shimmering color. Working from a popular Mendelsohn arrangement, Scholz creates a dynamic portrait of the sound of angel choruses ushering in Christmas Day. The opening blooms from a gently flowing flute solo to a lush orchestral texture, before leading the audience in with proud calls from the trumpets. As the verses continue, the melody is passed from instrument to instrument, weaving between the lines of the audience and massed choirs. Scholz’s arrangement brings the choirs, orchestra, and audience together in a magical music-making experience that has made it a fan-favorite for years.



³⁷Hawn, C. Michael, and Jeanne Larson Williams. “History of Hymns: ‘Angels, We Have Heard on High.’” History of hymns: “angels, we have heard on high,” December 22, 2015. <https://www.mississippi-umc.org/newsdetail/history-of-hymns-angels-we-have-heard-on-high-3216478>.

³⁸*New International Version (NIV)*. Biblica, Inc., 2011.

³⁹Mosteller, Angie. Angels We Have Heard On High. https://www.https://www.celebratingholidays.com/?page_id=2

⁴⁰Hawn, 2015.

⁴¹Matthews, Diana Leigh. “Behind the Christmas Carol: Angels We Have Heard on High ★ Diana Leigh Matthews.” Diana Leigh Matthews, November 28, 2019. <https://dianaleaghmatthews.com/angels-we-have-heard-on-high/>.

⁴²“Edward Shippen Barnes.” Hymnary.org. https://hymnary.org/person/Barnes_Edward.

Noël Novelet
(Sing We Now of Christmas)
arr. Cary Ratcliff

Through this enchanting arrangement using soprano and alto voices, along with several stringed instruments, the Manitou Singers' rendition of "Noël Novelet," which is translated into English as "Sing We Now of Christmas," arranged by Cary Ratcliff, takes the audience on a journey back to sixteenth-century Europe. The traditional carol has been around since then and was kept alive solely through oral tradition, until the seventeenth century when it was finally put into written form. In its earlier days, it was sung in familial and smaller gatherings, rather than in larger church settings. It was a traditional work that was passed down through generations. Considered somewhat late by modern standards, carols were usually sung around New Year's in earlier centuries, and this carol was no exception. However, some sources say the piece has always been a Christmas tune, as its lyrics point directly to the birth of the newborn king. The original composer is unknown, and the piece most likely premiered around Provence, France.

Cary Ratcliff arranged this rendition of the work as part of his triad of pieces called *Three Folk Carols*, which were commissioned for the Bach Children's Chorus of Rochester, New York. It premiered at Hochstein Performance Hall in December 2000. It includes SSA voice parts, and the harp, cello, hammer dulcimer, and flute. Ratcliff has directed numerous musical ensembles, both voice and instrumental, and has been the recipient of several accolades, including a Grammy nomination for Best Choral Performance. This arrangement is performed in a major key, which supports the uplifting, celebratory lyrics, which commemorate the birth of the newborn King in Christian tradition. An array of dynamics and articulations are used, highlighting the diversity of the instruments and voice parts in the composition.

The carol opens with the harp, which uses an entrancing tune to draw the audience in and set the tone of the piece. The sopranos and altos begin the song in unison, The hammer dulcimer, flute, oboe, and cello slowly trickle into the piece as the sopranos and altos split off into melody in harmony, adding a layer of complexity to the piece. The delicacy of the stringed instruments and woodwinds complement the angelic voices of the soprano and alto singers. Throughout the piece, the audience should listen for one part singing in English and the other echoing in French, preserving the piece's authenticity while also providing a translation for the English-speaking audience. As it progresses, the dynamics range from piano to forte, creating an interesting range within the arrangement. The song ends with a gradual crescendo over several measures, leading to a grand celebratory proclamation of "Noel!" sung by all voice parts, ending the carol on a grand note, complementing the monumental nature of the lyrics.⁴³



⁴³“Cary Ratcliff.” Lumivoice. <https://lumivoice.org/members/cary-ratcliff/>
Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott, *The New Oxford Book of Carols* (Oxford University Press Music, September 24, 1998).
William E. Studwell, *Christmas Carols: A Reference Guide* (Music Garland, November 1, 1984).
William Studwell, *Christmas Carol Reader* (Routledge, October 30, 1995).

Sleep, Jesus Sleep (Traditional Ukrainian)

arr. Roxanna Panufnik

Composer Roxanna Panufnik, described as adept in “mingling traditional music from diverse cultures” with her distinctive harmonic language, is committed to engaging her music with large-scale causes she is passionate about, like war, interfaith community, and unity through song (1, 2). She sent her arrangement of the traditional Ukrainian song, Sleep, Jesus, Sleep to every choral director she knew after writing it in 2022. She encouraged them to donate three Euros per score to the British Refugee Council, raising over nine thousand Euros and counting. The British Refugee Council assists with asylum for displaced people, and it was the place that helped her dad settle there when he fled Poland. The lullaby is said to be the equivalent of “Away in a Manger” in Ukraine, and Panufnik had it translated into English. It was released as a single originally, with the Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir, Ukrainian soprano Inna Husieva, and Afghan Tabla player Sulaiman Haqpana (3). This cause is important to her personally, being the daughter of a refugee (4), as her father fled Poland after World War II, facing political persecution from KGB agents. She continues to be grateful to the UK for providing asylum to him, and refugee crises will always be important to her for these reasons.

The piece opens with the melody as an appearing light, lullabying the heart of the beloved Ukrainian song. The choir, flooding the music with a building wave, then rises in sound and spirit, intensifying the passion of the manger scene, yet somehow the lowly gentleness, too. In the middle of the piece, the bass voices comfort the resting Baby Jesus, their souls yearning to rest beside Him on earth and in heaven. The choir joins them soon after, and a soaring soprano descant paints the sky of the manger scene, with shimmering, lush harmony that returns the music to the resting word: sleep.⁴⁴



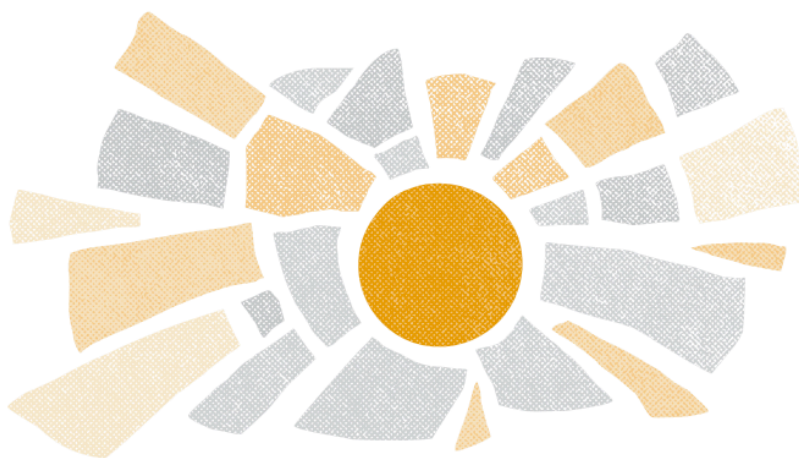
⁴⁴<https://roxannapanufnik.com/passionate-causes/>
<https://inews.co.uk/culture/music/roxanna-panufnik-new-carol-ukrainian-lullaby-helping-refugees-christmas-2019934?srsId=AfmBOora74LPoZRIhD73lGNtCeYEoJ2Ev2AABggmcdtEuR6K9AEk5JNu>
<https://roxannapanufnik.com/two-composers-approx-80-hands/>

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Kenneth Jennings '50

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” by Kenneth Jennings was published in 1962. Jennings was the third conductor of the St. Olaf Choir from the years 1968 to 1990 and was known for his humble attitude and his quiet, firm leadership.⁴⁵ His impact on the choir still resonates today with his expansion of international touring and accompaniment continuing to be part of the culture.⁴⁶ Jennings’ rendition of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” contrasts a delicate feeling of peace and calm with moments of growth and strength, setting a familiar text to a new tune. With harmonies that blanket the listener, this piece holds an overall sense of home that accompanies the holiday season.

The song is sung a cappella, underscoring an intimate and warm performance. Beginning with a soprano line that floats gently, imploring the listener to contemplate this quiet town, pulling back on the phrase “how still we see thee lie.” Once the rest of the choir enters, the sound begins to slowly crescendo throughout the rest of the verse. Drawing out the word “everlasting,” the choir paints a delayed ending of the phrase that emphasizes the meaning of the word. Ending the first verse on a note of calm but incompleteness, Jennings reprised a solo line at the beginning of the second half of the piece. Now held by the tenors, their melody delicately travels down the staff, on the words “o holy child,” as if rocking the listener to sleep. The rest of the choir enters with a sense of purpose, asking to be forgiven and welcoming God into their lives. The choir dramatically crescendos over the next phrase, reaching the loudest point on the words “great glad tidings,” declaring their knowledge and dedication to God. The following phrase feels like a plea, begging God to join them. The repetition of the words “abide with us our Lord Immanuel” paired with the variance of the melody reinforces the sincerity of the statement. In the final phrase, the choir enters serenely, rocking the listener to a peaceful ending.



⁴⁵Kennedy, Patrick. “St. Olaf Choir’s Kenneth Jennings Remembered for His Musicianship, Humble Manner.” *Star Tribune*, 1 Sept. 2015, www.startribune.com/st-olaf-choir-s-kenneth-jennings-remembered-for-his-musicianship-humble-manner/323774101.

⁴⁶VanDerVeen, Kari. “Former St. Olaf Choir Conductor Kenneth Jennings ’50 Dies.” *St. Olaf College*, 13 Oct. 2017, wp.stolaf.edu/news/former-st-olaf-choir-conductor-kenneth-jennings-50-dies.

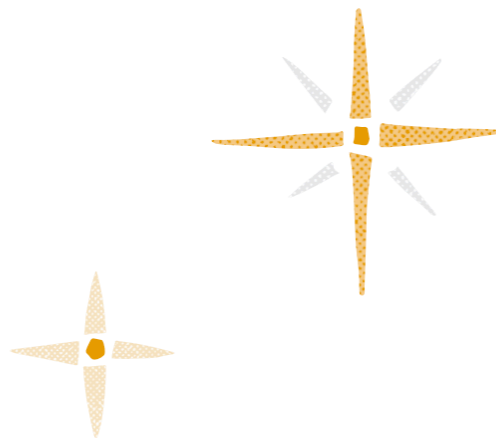
Ding Dong! Merrily on High

(French Carol)

arr. Carolyn Jennings

This lighthearted arrangement of the classic French carol is a staple Christmas piece at St. Olaf, having been featured in several previous Christmas Festivals. The composer, Carolyn Jennings, has composed for voice, orchestra, and piano. The majority of her works are choral compositions and arrangements, which are widely performed by church, school, and community choirs.⁴⁷ She is a Professor Emerita at St. Olaf College, and also served in administrative roles during her time on campus, including serving as Associate Dean of Fine Arts, as well as Chair of the Music Department. She also served as a church musician for over thirty years at St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield, Minnesota, where she held the roles of Music Coordinator and Director of the Senior Choir. Her late husband, Kenneth Jennings, served as the third conductor of the St. Olaf Choir. This is not the only Jennings piece of the concert: she also composed the opening choral-orchestral Christmas Festival piece "Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain."

This spirited piece's origins can be found in French dance music, dating back to the 16th century, although the lyrics are younger. In the early 20th century, English composer and passionate church bellringer George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848-1934), gave the piece a lively bell-inspired text to match the energetic melody.⁴⁸ The English verses are paired with the Latin refrain "Gloria! Hosanna in excelsis," which translates to "Glory! Hosanna in the highest." Singers triumphantly proclaim these lyrics in the famous cascading melody, often sung by sopranos. While sopranos take charge of this classic melody in the first refrain of Jennings's arrangement, it is playfully passed between the other voices during later refrains, weaving together a unique texture reminiscent of church bells and bell choirs alike.



⁴⁷ "Artist - Carolyn Jennings." *GIA Publications - Sacred Choral Music, Hymnals, Recordings and Educations Materials, Roman Catholic, Christian*, giamusic.com/artists/carolyn-jennings.

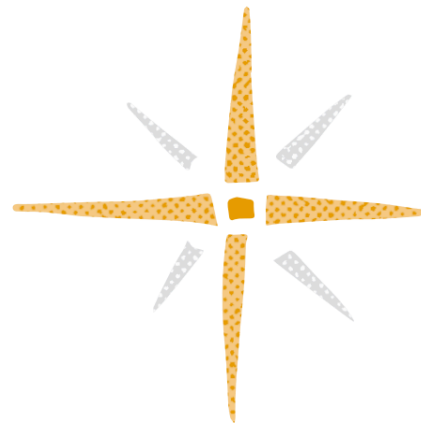
⁴⁸ Roberts, Maddy Shaw. "What Are the Lyrics to 'Ding Dong! Merrily on High', and What Does the Carol Mean?" *Classic FM*, Classic FM, 12 Dec. 2023, www.classicfm.com/discover-music/occasions/christmas/ding-dong-merrily-on-high-lyrics-meaning/.

Movement I (Gloria)

John Rutter

Growing up in North London with contemporaries such as John Tavener and Nicholas Snowman, it is no surprise that John Rutter rose to international fame in the world of late-twentieth-century choral music. Many of his works are well regarded, but his *Gloria* is what propelled his name to recognition. Written as a concert work despite the religious text, it was his first overseas commission, being sought after by the Omaha director Mel Olson. Rutter was asked to compose an accessible, yet challenging choral work for Olson's group, "The Voices of Mel Olson." Quickly after its premiere, Rutter was overwhelmed with commissions from all over the world, eventually leading to his retirement from being the director of music at Clare College. Rutter is widely known for his English mixed voice chamber choir, the Cambridge Singers.

Fifty years after the composition and premiere of the *Gloria*, Rutter's work continues to move and delight listeners. The piece begins brightly, with brass shining over the music and drums building tension into the entrance of the chorus. This motive starts and ends the movement in a broad sweep that amazes. This movement sets up the rest of the work, following a traditional Latin hymn of praise that many listeners may recognize. It is loud and joyful, while still alternating between broader brass sections and serene a cappella sections from the choir. It showcases Rutter's love of changing key centers, leaving the listener with a sense of wonder and mystery, therefore bringing out the text's deeper meaning of praise and glory to God. It is a strong opening movement that exhibits Rutter's love for Anglican church music and takes listeners on a musical journey.⁴⁹



⁴⁹https://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.557130&catNum=557130&filetype>About%20this%20Recording&language=English

http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2011/June11/Rutter_Gloria_8572653.htm

https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA6725

Overture
(Nutcracker Suite)
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

In 1939, the jazz pianist, bandleader, and composer Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington first collaborated with fellow pianist, composer, and arranger Billy Strayhorn. By this point in the ‘30s, Ellington’s public persona as a celebrity amongst music listeners and an icon within the African American community had become fully realized.⁵⁰ Yet, through partnering with Strayhorn—an architect of many jazz hits who was innately familiar with classical music—Ellington expanded his musical legacy.⁵¹ The duo’s synergy developed over 28 years; Strayhorn composed Ellington’s theme song “Take the A Train” and was often described as his creative “alter ego.”⁵² Their creative fusion persisted through the Spring of 1960 when Strayhorn began jazzing up a version of Tchaikovsky’s seasonal staple, *The Nutcracker Suite*.⁵³ At the time, Strayhorn was struggling with “periods of isolation and delay unless he found a particular musical project inspiring.”⁵⁴ Working on *The Nutcracker Suite* served as a “reparative and creative outlet” for Strayhorn, while the suite’s form and historical linkage to dance/programmatic expression fit within Ellington’s “Jazz idiom.”⁵⁵ The composing duo manifested their musical interpretation through rearranging and “reorchestrating” the famous ballet, which was subsequently recorded by “Ellington’s 16-man orchestra” in the summer of 1960.⁵⁶ The reimagined Overture sets a relaxed, familiar mood for the suite, emanating the original’s elegance while showcasing the jazz orchestra’s distinctive soundscape.⁵⁷

Strayhorn considered the task of adapting Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker Suite* for orchestra to be challenging, remarking, “It’s always a struggle...to present the music of someone of the stature of...Tchaikovsky and adapting it to our flavor without distorting him.”⁵⁸ For Strayhorn, undertaking the anachronistic arrangement of the suite tied him empathetically to Tchaikovsky—both were gay men and for Strayhorn, “such deep investments in artistic pursuits provided both refuge and compensatory pleasure” amidst oppressive social conditions.⁵⁹ Ellington and Strayhorn brought “charm and sophistication” to their adaptation, while still maintaining humorous and familial elements through their “reorchestration” of the suite’s dance titles.⁶⁰ Changing the titles of the original suite—for example, “Sugar Plum Fairy” morphed into “Sugar Rum Cherry”—transformed the once imperial Russian commodities into popular American holiday products.⁶¹ Musically, the duo’s introduction of the ballet to an American context is evident from the Overture’s outset. Its

⁵⁰ Andrew Berish, “Survival, Adaptation, and Experimentation: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra in the 1930s,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duke Ellington*, ed. Edward Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 106–20. doi:10.1017/CCO9781139021357.011.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Schwartz, “Big Band and Beethoven,” Oregon Symphony, 2018,

<https://www.orsymphony.org/concerts-tickets/program-notes/1819/big-band-and-beethoven/>

⁵² Ibid, “Billy Strayhorn, Duke’s Jazz Man, Dies at 51.” Bay State Banner (1965-1979), Jun 10, 1967.

<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/billy-strayhorn-dukes-jazz-man-dies-at-51/docview/371356579/se-2>.

⁵³ Lisa Barg, “Queer Encounters in the Music of Billy Strayhorn,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66, no. 3 (2013): 794. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2013.66.3.771>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 797; Kerry Clawson, “Orchestra offers cool jazz twist to holiday favorite with Ellington’s ‘Nutcracker Suite,’” *Akron Beacon Journal*, last modified November 6, 2022,

<https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/entertainment/arts/2022/11/06/akron-symphony-to-perform-exciting-jazz-twist-on-nutcracker-favorite/69599265007/>

⁵⁷ Katherine Baber, “Ellington *Nutcracker Suite*,” Redlands Symphony, <https://www.redlandssymphony.com/pieces/ellington-nutcracker-suite>

⁵⁸ Barg, “Queer Encounters in the Music of Billy Strayhorn,” 796.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jams.2013.66.3.771?sid=primo&seq=26#metadata_info_tab_contents

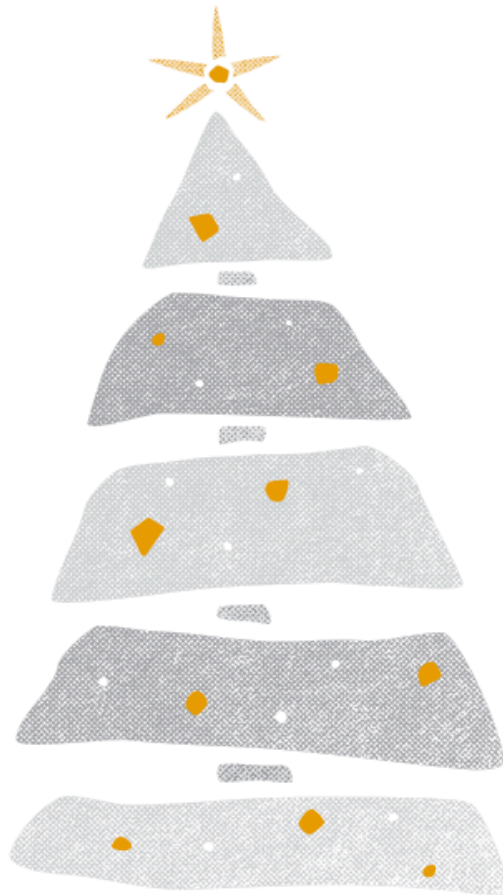
⁵⁹ Ibid, 795-796.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 797.

⁶¹ Ibid.

medium swing suggests “alternative domestic images of family and community” while transporting Tchaikovsky to an urban, cosmopolitan space—New York, New York.⁶²

The *Nutcracker Suite*'s Overture kicks off with a thumping walking bass line. Listen for its fall into the rhythm section's pocket before swinging into the recognizably romantic opening melody (which still exudes the big band sound of Harlem's Cotton Club).⁶³ The theme, crackling like a wood-burning fireplace, simmers into a cooler saxophone feature before the orchestra rises back to the familiar opening material. A wailing, muted trombone interjects at the piece's midpoint; this sets the stage for a yearning theme introduced via the violins and trumpets, which tastefully transitions into a smooth trumpet solo. Trailing the trumpet, the orchestra restates its cry before rich jazz harmonies ebb into a full, big-band-esque soundscape. Swinging scales float further downwind—literally, passing between woodwinds while the brass bid farewell. The overture ends with a bold, final burst led by the low brass, a notable divergence from the 1892 Overture's delicate departure with upper strings and winds. Reenvisioned for a modern American audience, enjoy this twentieth-century take on Tchaikovsky's cozy Christmastime classic.



⁶² Ibid, 799.

⁶³ Clawson, “Orchestra offers cool jazz twist to holiday favorite with Ellington's 'Nutcracker Suite,'”

<https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/entertainment/arts/2022/11/06/akron-symphony-to-perform-exciting-jazz-twist-on-nutcracker-favorite/69599265007/>

Three Generations of Burt Family Carols

Rev. Bates G. Burt, Alfred S. Burt, and Abbie Burt Betinis '01

In 1922, Rev. Bates Burt started writing original Christmas carols and sending them as greeting cards to his family and friends. He passed the tradition to his son, Alfred Burt, in 1942. They produced five carols together before Bates' death in 1948. Since graduating from St. Olaf College with a degree in music composition in 2001, Abbie Burt Betinis has been carrying on this family tradition. She has published 21 Christmas carols and counting, many of which have premiered on Minnesota Public Radio.⁶⁴

This year, St. Olaf College commissioned Betinis to write the carol collage, a St. Olaf Christmas Festival tradition. Betinis' arrangement is a celebration of the Burt family carol-writing tradition, containing carols from all three generations. The piece begins with all five choirs singing "Caroling, Caroling" together, a popular carol that one will likely hear often on the radio during Christmastime. Composed in 1954, the music to "Caroling, Caroling" was written by Alfred Burt and the lyrics were written by Wihla Hutson, a family friend and the organist at Bates Burt's church. This carol was one of the last Alfred composed before dying of cancer at just 33 years old.⁶⁵ While it has a melancholy backstory, this joyful tune has become a classic, and it starts and ends the carol collage with Christmas cheer. Viking Chorus sings the next carol, "Come In! Come In!" which was composed in 2011 by Abbie Betinis. Betinis puts a unique spin on the classic carol form by writing a four-part canon, instead of the traditional verse and refrain structure, creating rich harmonies as the melody moves from group to group. The piece then transitions to "All on a Christmas Morning," sung by Chapel Choir. Bates Burt wrote the lyrics, while the music was composed by his son, Alfred Burt. This is one of the few carols that the father-son team got to write together before Bates' death.⁶⁶ Immediately after it finishes, we hear the steady beat of a hand drum, starting Cantorei's "Let's Have a Merry Song Tonight." Composed in 1940 by Bates Burt, this is the oldest carol in the carol collage.⁶⁷ After Cantorei's merry tune comes a more serious, yet still hopeful, carol, sung by the St. Olaf Choir. Composed by Abbie Betinis in 2008, the lyrics are based on a prose poem by Bates Burt.⁶⁸ The soprano voices sing the melody, while the rest of the choir vocalizes ethereally underneath until all voices join in on the lyrics at the end. This powerful ending intimately pauses on the word "Love" before the other choirs make a bell-like transition to the last carol. Sung by the Manitou Singers, "Hail, Christmas Day!" was composed by Betinis in 2003 with lyrics by Rev. John Burt, Alfred Burt's brother. The carol concludes with a canon similar to "Come In! Come In!" with each of the 3 parts of a melody bouncing through the choir. The carol collage ends with all the choirs joining in on a grand reprise of "Caroling, Caroling," reminding us of the rich carol-writing tradition that has existed for many years and will continue to spread hope and joy to anyone who hears a Christmas carol.



⁶⁴Abbie Betinis, *Three Generations of Burt Family Carols*, 2023, https://www.abbiebetinis.com/writings_burtcarols.html.

⁶⁵Anne Burt, "Burt Family History," *Alfred Burt Carols*, 2005, https://alfredburtcarols.com/burt/Web%20Pages/burt_family.htm.

⁶⁶Anne Burt, "Burt Family History," *Alfred Burt Carols*, 2005, https://alfredburtcarols.com/burt/Web%20Pages/burt_family.htm.

⁶⁷Abbie Betinis, *Three Generations of Burt Family Carols*, 2023, https://www.abbiebetinis.com/writings_burtcarols.html.

⁶⁸Abbie Betinis, *Behind the Clouds*, 2013, http://www.abbiebetinis.com/works/behind_the_clouds.html.

Jeg er så glad ("I Am So Glad")

Peder Knudsen, arr. Robert V. Scholz '61

Jeg Er Så Glad Hver Julekveld (English: *I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve*) is one of Norway's most beloved Christmas hymns. The lyrics of this traditional folk song were published in 1859 in Norwegian novelist Marie Wexelsen's book *Ketil. En Julegave for de Smaa* (*Ketil. A Christmas gift for the Little Ones*). As an educator who focused heavily on women's and children's rights and social issues, Wexelsen aimed to include the image of a mother's love and Jesus' love. The message within the lyrics was one of the first to present children with an accessible version of the meaning of Christmas, centered around joy and positivity that softened the Church's traditionally strict religious messages.⁶⁹ Just decades earlier, the Norwegian king controlled the church and thus how holidays like Christmas could be understood and celebrated. However, starting in the 1830s, groups of Norwegians began dissenting from the traditional church.⁷⁰ Wexelsen's lyrics, first translated into English by Peter A. Sveeggen,⁷¹ encourage children to be joyful during the Christmas season, for Jesus opens the kingdom to every child.



Composer Peder Knudsen (1819-1863) wrote the melody to accompany Marie Wexelsen's lyrics. The melody, traditionally sung in 6/8 time, has become a pinnacle of Norwegian Christmas celebrations because of its simplicity and memorability. Sung in a major key, in Robert Scholz's arrangement the piece sounds as if it is imitating the wind on a snowy day as each measure sways back and forth until the final resolution.

Jeg Er Så Glad Hver Julekveld reflects both the process and the spirit of its composition. Marie Wexelsen took the Christmas narrative and incorporated it into a children's story, creating a new song that ended up improving the lives of Norwegians and non-Norwegians alike. The lyrics allow religious and non-religious listeners to reflect on the time spent with family and loved ones. While the Christmas narrative is not new, the ways it can be interpreted and used in different holiday traditions bring those of varying backgrounds together to enjoy the music and holiday season.



⁶⁹<https://trondheim.com/marie-wexelsen-1832-1911>

⁷⁰Malmgart, Liselotte. "State and Church in Denmark and Norway." pg 214.

⁷¹https://hymnary.org/person/Sveeggen_P

O Day Full of Grace

Christoph E. F. Weyse, arr. F. Melius Christiansen

“O Day Full of Grace” was originally a Danish folk hymn and versions of the tune were sung throughout Scandinavia as early as 1450.⁷² On the thousandth anniversary of Christianity coming to Denmark in 1859, Nikolaj Grundtvig arranged the folk hymn “O Day Full of Grace” to the tune that we know today. In the late 19th century, Grundtvig was known as the best of all hymn writers, as he composed or arranged around 1500 hymns. Grundtvig is known as one of the most influential people in Danish history. Grundtvig’s ideas have a lasting impact on Danish education, politics, and the church. He is known as the father of the Danish Folk School movement that aimed to educate Danish youth in national culture and history as well as teach youth how to be an active member of Danish democracy. Because of his dedication to teaching the importance of democracy, Grundtvig was elected for the first Danish parliament in 1849.⁷³ Folk Schools gained enough traction to come to the USA and the school in Tennessee, the Highlander Folk School, educated Rosa Parks.

F. Melius Christiansen has been an influential figure to both the St. Olaf Choir and choral community, as well as nationally through sacred music repertoire and hymn arrangements. In fact, “O Day Full of Grace” has become a beloved Christmas standard for choirs around the US.⁷⁴ As a conductor and composer, Christiansen felt that *a cappella* music was the strongest way to demonstrate the talent and vocal integrity of the choirs.⁷⁵ In his arrangements, Christiansen begins most pieces with steady, well-known original hymn settings to settle the audience’s ears to the composition before expanding and rearranging the original melody. He is very well known for his use of text painting in musical phrases, showcasing the meaning of the texts. Listen as Christiansen paints a sunrise through the choirs’ voicings. When the text reads “then rose, the sun divine,” notice the melodic lines ascending in chords leading into the final cadence before the B section as if the sun has finally broken above the horizon when the final chord is reached.

The first two verses of “O Day Full of Grace” focus on Jesus’ incarnation and birth, talking about “light” coming into a “dark” place. The final verse brings us to the end of life and into eternity, written as a reminder that the goal of faithful works is to strengthen us and keep us grounded in His word and faith always. “O Day Full of Grace” perfectly embodies the idea that God fills our every day with grace and guides us towards the light.



⁷²Stafford, Shawn. “‘O Day Full of Grace’: A Scandinavian Hymn for Pentecost.” *Steadfast Lutherans*, 17 May 2013.

⁷³Grundtvig Library. “Grundtvig on Education, Politics, Church.” *Grundtvig*, Grundtvigsk Forum, 2019, grundtvig.dk/grundtvig/.

⁷⁴Plantinga, Harry. “O Day Full Of Grace.” *Hymnary.org*, Hymnary Society, 2007.

⁷⁵“F. Melius Christiansen.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 19 Sept. 2019.

The Winds of Hope

Steven Amundson

Before beginning his 41-year legacy at St. Olaf College in 1981, Steven Amundson completed musical training through Luther College, Northwestern University, the University of Virginia, and the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria—where he earned the *Hans Håring* prize at the 1980 International Conducting Competition—and finally Colorado’s Aspen Music School.⁷⁶ During his time at St. Olaf, Amundson was the St. Olaf Orchestra conductor as well as a professor of conducting, instrumentation, and music theory. Under his leadership, the St. Olaf Orchestra was featured on the Austrian Nation Radio, NPR, and PBS, received the Meritorious Orchestra Award from the Minnesota Chapter of the American String Teachers Association in 1996,⁷⁷ and won the American Prize in Orchestral Performance among colleges and universities in 2013 and 2019. Other awards Amundson received include Orchestra Educator of the Year from the Minnesota Music Educators Association in 1992 and Luther College’s Carlo A. Sperati Award in 1995, which recognizes long-standing achievement in music. In addition, Amundson was the Founding conductor of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra—previously known as the Central Chamber Orchestra—from 1982 to 1987 and returned as its music director during the fall of this year.⁷⁸ Amundson has also led ensembles in 37 states and 14 countries⁷⁹ and served as an All-State Orchestra guest conductor in 26 states.⁸⁰ In regards to composition, Amundson’s holiday-themed works have been performed by hundreds of orchestras spanning the United States along with the Toronto Symphony and BBC Orchestra.⁸¹

The Buffalo Community Orchestra in Buffalo, Minnesota commissioned and premiered the Winds of Hope on December 10, 2023. Amundson’s composition calls for an orchestra, choir, and handbell ensemble,⁸² ring out a message of hope so that comfort, peace, and love—especially around the holidays—are exposed and therefore tackle the increasing divisions the United States faces. This piece starts with the soft sound of chimes ringing in the distance over the orchestra and choir, forming a stirring in the air described as “the winds of hope” on Christmas morning. However, a stillness in the night looms, causing the voices to “lift [their] hearts in prayer” to fill the space with a hopeful desire for war and pain to end. The choir and short melodies of the woodwinds and strings slowly dwell on the words “peace” and “love” for a brief yet important moment, with these positivities making the voices discover that “the winds of hope are now [their] breath,” a tangible word to be swiftly spread to others as the musicians hasten while exponentially filling the room with sound. A spirit of dance comes to life with syncopated rhythms as the voices gather in unison to proclaim joy, comfort, peace, and love on Christmas day. As the music accelerates while booming cheerful, the brass blasts a call of good news, the strings act light and bouncy, and the chimes and handbells ring non-stop. As the musicians reminisce on the joyful sounds enthralling them, the piece ends on a triumphant high note and the shouting of the proclamation: “Amen!”

⁷⁶“Holiday for Orchestra with Ringers and Singers,” Buffalo Community Orchestra, <https://bcomn.org/event/holiday-for-orchestra-with-ingers-and-singers/>.

⁷⁷“Steve Amundson,” Kjos, Neil A. Kjos Music Company, <https://kjos.com/person/view?id=1343>.

⁷⁸“About Steve Amundson,” The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, <https://msomn.org/about-steven-amundson/>.

⁷⁹“Holiday for Orchestra with Ringers and Singers,” Buffalo Community Orchestra, <https://bcomn.org/event/holiday-for-orchestra-with-ingers-and-singers/>.

⁸⁰“About Steve Amundson,” The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, <https://msomn.org/about-steven-amundson/>.

⁸¹“Holiday for Orchestra with Ringers and Singers,” Buffalo Community Orchestra, <https://bcomn.org/event/holiday-for-orchestra-with-ingers-and-singers/>.

⁸²“Holiday for Orchestra with Ringers and Singers,” Buffalo Community Orchestra, <https://bcomn.org/event/holiday-for-orchestra-with-ingers-and-singers/>.

O God Our Help In Ages Past

(ELW 632)

William Croft, arr. John Ferguson

A mainstay of American hymnals, “O God Our Help in Ages Past” is a classic English hymn with a rich history. It is set to a melody by William Croft (1678-1727), a former organist of Westminster Abbey who also worked at St. Anne’s Church, Soho, after which this hymn tune, St. Anne, is named.⁸³ After the tune’s inception in the early eighteenth century, it became quite popular, even traveling as far as North Germany to the ears of J. S. Bach himself, who wrote a monumental fugue for pipe organ based on the melody. The text was written in 1719 by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), one of the most prolific English hymn writers of the 18th Century who composed roughly 700 hymns and psalm paraphrases.⁸⁴ Watts was one of the first to paraphrase the Psalms in the language of the New Testament, thereby “Christianizing” them and making them more appealing to modern Protestant Christian congregations through the use of lyrics that were powerful yet easy to sing.⁸⁵ He was especially popular with congregations of the early United States, and collections of his works were published in dozens of books. One of his most popular of Watts’ hymns, “O God Our Help in Ages Past” has appeared in over a thousand hymnals since its creation and spans multiple denominations of Christianity. The hymn emphasizes the importance of God’s strength as a stronghold to bear us through difficult times. As we currently live in a country that is racked with much strife and angst and consumed with poverty and inequity, this hymn shares a message that God is with us through trying times and will shelter us from the challenges of the world. Listen for this strength shining through in John Ferguson’s orchestration.

A beloved member of the St. Olaf community and mentor to many generations of music students, Ferguson served as Professor of Organ and Church Music, conducted the St. Olaf Cantorei, and was Cantor to the Student Congregation from 1983 until his retirement in 2012. Known as “Ferg” to his students, he has had a wide-reaching career with more than 100 works in print and has performed hymn festivals abroad in Seoul, South Korea, and in Europe at the National Cathedral of Norway.⁸⁶



⁸³Shaw, Watkins, and Graydon Beeks. “Croft [Crofts], William.” Grove Music Online. 2001; <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000006853>.

⁸⁴ “O God, Our Help In Ages Past.” Hymnary.org. https://hymnary.org/text/our_god_our_help_in_ages_past_watts

“St. Anne.” Hymnary.org. https://hymnary.org/tune/st_anne_croft

⁸⁵ Crookshank, Esther R. “Watts, Isaac.” Grove Music Online. 31 Jan. 2014;

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002259340>.

⁸⁶ “Dr. John Ferguson, Music Advisor Emeritus.” Sing For Joy. <https://www.stolaf.edu/singforjoy/about/musicadv-emeritus.html>

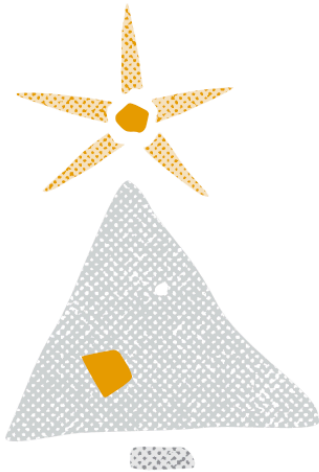
O Holy Night

Adolphe Adam, arr. John Rutter

This beloved French hymn, originally composed by Adolphe Charles Adam in 1847, is among the most popular Christmas Eve service solo pieces around the world. Originally titled “Cantique de Noel,” French lyricist Placide Cappeau wrote the text and then asked his friend Adolphe Adam to set music to the poem. It received its premiere in Roquemaure, France by famous opera singer Emily Laurey a few weeks later at the Christmas Eve midnight mass. “Cantique de Noel” became popular in Europe, and after American writer John Sullivan Dwight translated it into English, it became widespread in America, too.

On Christmas Eve in 1871, while the Germans were in the midst of a battle with the French during the Franco-Prussian War, there was a twenty-four-hour truce (much like the well-known WWI Christmas Day truce), and legend has it that the French sang the hallowed “Cantique de Noel” during this time.⁸⁷

John Rutter sets this song for orchestra and mixed choir, with a soaring, familiar but occasionally ornamented soprano melody. The piece begins with the distant hums of the altos, tenors, and basses, while the sopranos carry the text to the first chorus. The expectant waiting of Christ in the season of Advent is musically depicted as the piece grows in depth. The gentle support of the sopranos intensifies when the hums become open vowels, with the massed choir joining on the text at the end. There is an echo of the melody as the voices drive the passion, power, and wonder of the newborn Christ to the end of the piece. Finishing with a strong proclamation, the voices leave the orchestra to fade back into the stillness in which the piece began. The steady pulse, the breathtaking build as the melody soars and echoes through the different voices, and the anticipation of the ending all mirror the perfectly planned, glorious birth of Christ, who flawlessly humbled Himself to enter this world in a lowly manger out of love for us. As you hear this cherished melody, you are encouraged to remember the profound, miraculous sight as the Star of Bethlehem shone brightly that first Christmas.



⁸⁷McCarron, Patrick, and Ann H Gabhart. “The Story behind the Song O Holy Night.” *Ann H. Gabhart*, 12 Dec. 2021, www.annhgabhart.com/2019/12/16/the-story-behind-the-song-o-holy-night/.

Beautiful Savior
(Silesian Folk Tune)
F. Melius Christiansen

Performing *Beautiful Savior* is a decades-long tradition for St. Olaf choral ensembles. The melody is a Silesian folk song that was arranged by F. Melius Christiansen in 1910.⁸⁸ F.M. Christiansen originally set the tune to Norwegian text and later published it in English for the St. Olaf Choral Series. The hymn became a staple of the annual St. Olaf Christmas Festival beginning in 1924, but it did not become a consistent recessional or final piece until 1950, under Olaf C. Christiansen. Since its establishment as a tradition, it has been performed in various ways and various parts of the program. In this way, *Beautiful Savior* has come to be regarded as “practically synonymous” with the St. Olaf choirs.⁸⁹

The complete hymn is in three parts. The first part is hummed, the second features a mezzo-soprano soloist with tenor and bass backing, and the third is sung by the entire choir. The third portion is the most recognizable, as it is sung at the end of every Christmas Festival. The song begins softly and gradually crescendos to the triumphant climax with the text “Now and forevermore be thine!”. The powerful finish to the piece often leaves the audience in awed silence for several seconds.



Christmas Festival Dress Rehearsal, 1989⁹⁰

Beautiful Savior is a familiar hymn across the U.S., and no matter where performers or listeners are from, it will evoke strong emotions. To different people, this song can have different messages. Decades ago, under F. Melius Christiansen, the Choir sang this piece on a hospital lawn in Rochester. Windows opened, and patients were wheeled out onto the balconies to hear the music.⁹¹ *Beautiful Savior* was a form of healing for these people. For the choristers, it may be a song of unity and rouse a sense of togetherness. As Dr. Armstrong said in an interview, the piece provides “a wonderful bonding for everyone”.⁹² *Beautiful Savior* is a unique opportunity for performers and audience members alike, at the end of every concert, to reflect on the music that has been shared and the gift that has been given to those listening.

⁸⁸ <https://wp.stolaf.edu/stolaf-choir/frequently-asked-questions/>

⁸⁹ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir : a Narrative* Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*